

# Annual Report 2020



Virginia Sexual and Domestic  
Violence Action Alliance



2020-2021  
GOVERNING BODY

---

**Raven Freeborn**  
Facilitator

**Laura Beth Weaver**  
Finance Officer

**Alejandro Prince**  
Strategic Impact Officer

**Nikki Duncan-Talley**  
Communications and  
Development Officer

**Virginia Powell**  
Leadership Development  
and Governance Officer

---

Marybeth Adkins  
Samantha Clarke  
Rosalind Cook  
Cortney Fisher  
Josephine Gonzalez  
Ted Heck  
Lenora Jones Elliott  
Sam Page  
Brad Perry  
Tremayne Robertson  
Claire Hylton Sheppard  
Fatima Smith  
Gretchen Soto  
Ellen Yackel

## From the Director

*"You can't stop the waves,  
but you can learn to surf."  
- Jon Kabat-Zinn*

Dear Friends,

Looking back at 2020, I'm reminded that the Action Alliance does an amazing job responding to changing circumstances in the midst of crisis. There have been so many things out of our control, and we've learned how to better ride the waves, and get back up when they knock us down.

This annual report illustrates our abilities to nimbly adapt to changing situations to meet members' needs; to pivot and shift services; to be and do better in our work to advance racial equity; and to build the foundations for a brighter future.

Thank you to all the advocates who have worked tirelessly to support survivors. I hope you take a chance to rest and recharge. Thank you to our members, donors, and supporters: together, we're moving towards a future with thriving communities.

In peace,  
Kristi VanAudenhove



# Adaptability STRETCHING IN NEW WAYS

## Creating New Spaces to Connect and Support Members and Survivors

The pandemic affected just about every facet of our work. It required us to rethink how we connect our members to each other for training and support and how we all provide services to survivors. In response to physical distancing and “stay at home” requirements, the Action Alliance created asynchronous virtual training modules and synchronous webinars, as well as new tools and resources for advocates and activists.



New challenges to our own mental health and to how we serve survivors led to the opening of community care and problem solving spaces for staff at agencies to learn from and support each other. We also kept in frequent communication with directors of local sexual and domestic violence agencies as safety protocols and funding issues were, and continue to be, ever evolving.

In the early months of the pandemic, we launched a statewide campaign, #StaySafeVA, to raise public awareness that crisis centers were open and available to support survivors. Stay at home orders, economic hardship, and family isolation combined to create circumstances where the likelihood of family violence increased and the ability of survivors to gain safety decreased.



# Resilience

## RISING UP STRONGER

### Civic Engagement as Survivor Advocacy

In addition to being a year of COVID, 2020 was also a year for the decennial census and presidential elections. The Action Alliance partnered with New Virginia Majority to help survivors understand how issues important to them were on the ballot. Together, we also informed crisis centers how they can help survivors with unstable housing get registered to vote.

The U.S. Census is the government’s attempt to count every person living in the country. The results are used in drawing electoral boundaries and to allocate resources to states and localities. Persons from marginalized communities have been historically undercounted and thereby their communities have been underfunded. As part of our Building Thriving Communities work to encourage civic participation, we shared important Census information with agencies and survivors, and encouraged them to participate in the head count that is so critical to ensuring representation and funding.





## Reimagining Our Legacy and Public Safety

Through the decades, efforts to address sexual and intimate partner violence in Virginia (whether locally or statewide) have involved and engaged law enforcement and the criminal justice system in myriad ways. In our history we have not always centered the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color in our advocacy around criminal justice.

We are now, and have been leading up to it for some time, in a moment of reckoning in the movement to correct past failures in which we did not listen to Black feminist liberationists and other colleagues of color who cautioned against increased policing and prosecution as the primary solution to gender-based violence.

We joined with 44 other coalitions nationwide in signing on to a "Moment of Truth" statement acknowledging ways that our movement, particularly white leadership within the movement, has failed Black, Indigenous and people of color survivors, leaders, and organizations. We recognize that while we work to transform oppressive institutions around us, we must also transform ourselves. To do better and be better, the Action Alliance will listen to and center Black, Indigenous, and other survivors of color as we join their vision of liberation and work to reframe our ideas of public safety, decriminalize survival, and shift care to local communities.



# Fortitude TAPPING INNER STRENGTHS

## Survivor Advocacy During the Pandemic

Survivors of recent or ongoing sexual and intimate partner violence faced unique challenges during the stay-at-home orders of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was limited ability to physically distance themselves from the people who harmed them. Additional pandemic-related stressors made it more difficult to seek support services. Stressors included job and wage loss, health concerns, loss of childcare, school and court closures, as well as strained interpersonal relationships. Our advocates were and are steadfast. They remain available to meet the increased need for support and provide assistance with safety planning and access to resources.



**30%**

Total calls to the Virginia Statewide Hotline increased by 30% between 2019 and 2020.



**70%**

Text and chat contacts to the Virginia Statewide Hotline increased by nearly 70% between 2019 and 2020.



“

PES has become a profound organization in my life and my son's life. They were my personal superhero when I felt I had no where to turn for financial assistance, resources and support in every way possible. They ensured that my son and I were protected not only at home, but in my travels to and from work and my son's school. The people with this organization are heaven sent angels and I couldn't be more blessed to have such beautiful and hard-working people in my corner during the absolute worst time of my life. I would recommend PES to any person struggling with domestic and sexual violence.

~Survivor

”

The numbers don't tell the full story, though. Our Project for the Empowerment of Survivors (PES), which provides legal guidance, assistance, and referrals, saw not only an increase in the number of survivors seeking information and services, but also an increase in the complexity of cases and severity of abuse.

During the pandemic, PES legal advocates and attorneys assisted victims as they navigated complex legal issues, including:

- Victims inaccurately labeled as the "perpetrator" by the criminal justice system. Statistically, this is most likely to happen to women of color, who are disproportionately arrested and prosecuted when acting in self defense. When this happens, victims experience "secondary victimization" by the criminal justice system because federal funding restrictions prevent them from accessing the very services (e.g., shelters and legal services) intended to help them escape their situations.
- Pandemic-related custody concerns, such as questions around relocation, schooling, vaccination of children, and potential exposure to the virus.
- Challenges with Child Protective Services, including extensive delays in investigations.
- Evictions and houselessness.

Thankfully, PES is able to rely on the generosity of pro-bono and low-bono attorneys and use donations from private foundations and donors to help survivors navigate these challenges.

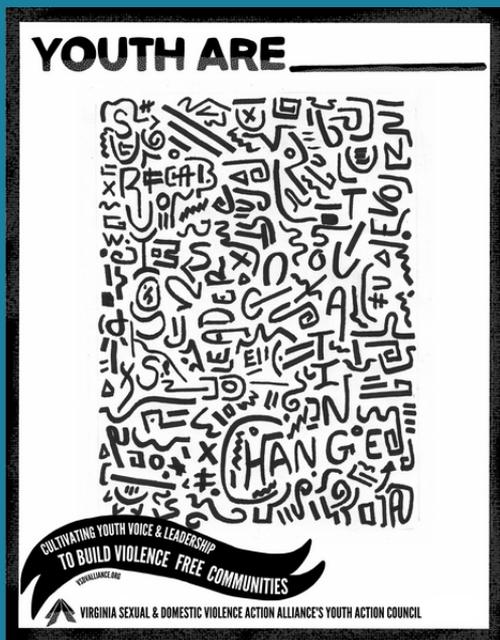
# Growth

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

### Establishing Virginia's Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention Fund

Often, the best form of victim services is to prevent violence before it occurs in the first place. In 2020, we successfully advocated at the Virginia General Assembly to create the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention Fund. This fund will be used to develop, support, and evaluate programs that prevent sexual and domestic violence. \$1.5 million was initially allocated over the biennium to support this fund but, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature's final budget did not include funding for the new Fund. During the 2021 General Assembly session, however, we were able to restore \$750,000 to the Prevention Fund.





## Building Youth Resiliency and Leadership

Following 2019's Honeycomb Retreat, an arts and creative expression-based retreat for young advocates, activists and movement builders ages 18-24, a Youth Action Council (YAC) was established to continue building young people's leadership skills. The YAC provides opportunities for youth who have worked with local sexual and domestic violence agencies or are organizers to bring back to their communities the skills they've learned with the Action Alliance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Action Alliance began working with youth online through "Youth Connection Zoom" meetings facilitated by YAC members. YAC members are also engaged in creating new curricula and content, and are encouraged to join the Governing Body. The second YAC cohort will begin in September 2021.

# Collective Action

## OUR SUPPORTERS

As a coalition, the Action Alliance relies on the generosity of our supporters who share in our vision for a violence-free Virginia and invest their time and money in our work. We appreciate each and every donation we receive. Our work was made possible by our state and federal funding partners, as well as...



85

organizational members, including 66 sexual and domestic violence agencies and 19 affiliate agencies working to address sexual and intimate partner violence.



120

individual members, including 80 Lifetime Members whose contributions have made it possible to respond quickly to emerging needs.



200+

individuals and community partners whose donations expand our ability to support survivors and sustain our prevention, policy, and social change work.

Your membership and contributions are vital to the work of the Action Alliance and to the long-term financial health of the coalition.

Thank you for your support!

Revenues for 2020: \$3,549,044

Expenses for 2020: \$3,430,245

The Action Alliance is primarily funded by state and federal contracts, which totaled \$2,778,832.

In 2020, the Action Alliance was able to receive a Payroll Protection Program loan, which was forgiven and allowed us to maintain staffing and helped stabilize our finances during the pandemic.

Copies of our audited financial statements and 990 tax return are available upon request.



## 40th Anniversary Legacy Circle Giving Challenge

A few generous, long-time supporters of the Action Alliance have come together to issue a challenge in honor of our 40th Anniversary: identify 40 donors to join the Legacy Circle. For each supporter who names the Action Alliance as a beneficiary in their will, estate plans, or as part of a retirement benefit or life insurance plan, the Action Alliance will receive a \$200 donation this year! Help us unlock a \$200 gift today.

### What legacy will you leave?

*Your gifts to the Action Alliance reflect your values... a commitment to bravery, respect, and equity. Leaving an estate gift to the Action Alliance is one way to ensure your values last beyond your lifetime.*



Start planning your  
legacy today...



(804) 377-0335

[give@vsdvalliance.org](mailto:give@vsdvalliance.org)

Make a gift that lasts for  
generations to come.



Virginia Sexual and Domestic  
Violence Action Alliance

[www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org)



@VActionAlliance



@vsdvaa